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Serial Story No. 25

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The Marathon Mystery

A Story of Manhattan

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

Author of "The Holiday Case"

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"You wished to see me?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Yes, Miss Croydon," replied Godfrey, more gently perhaps than he had intended to speak. "This is Mr. Lester," he added, "who has been engaged to defend Mr. Delroy."

She acknowledged the introduction with the faintest of bows.

"I hope Mr. Lester will be successful," she said, in the coldest of tones. One would have thought her a more cheerful acquaintance of my client.

I saw Godfrey looking at her with searching eyes, and his face hardened.

"We mean to be successful," he said curtly. "You may as well ask us to sit down, Miss Croydon, because our hands here will take some time, and I am sure it will tire you to stand."

"Really," she began, then her eyes met his, burning with meaning. "Oh, very well," she said faintly and sank into the chair nearest her.

"Now, Miss Croydon," Godfrey continued in the same chilly imperative tone, "I intend to speak to you bluntly and directly. We have beaten about the bush too long already. I see that you are not inclined to deal frankly with us. You have not been frank with us from the first. You have sought to blind us, to throw us off the track. Therefore I shall tell you what we already know in order that you may realize how useless it is for you to try to hold us off. We're going to see that the guilty man is punished, not for this crime alone, but also for that other one at the Marathon, of which you were the only witness. You shall not be permitted to keep him from justice a day longer. In the first place, we know that this man Tremaine inveigled your sister into a schoolgirl elopement and marriage; that she resented from him; that she thought him dead; that married Delroy came to New York; Tremaine followed her and attempted the extortion of blackmail; you met him at the Marathon; while you were talking Tremaine interfered and Tremaine killed him, escaping before the officers arrived. You did not know Thompson, but you saw Tremaine and the take out his pocketbook. You heard me read a line or two from one of a pocket of clippings we found there, and while we were in the bedroom you took these clippings from the body and hid them under the edge of the carpet."

She breathed a long sigh and sat erect again.

"Ah," she said, with a little smile, "I was beginning to fear you, all that seemed so supernatural. But now I see where your information came from."

"It is correct, then?" asked Godfrey.

"Yes," she answered. "Yes."

Godfrey leaned back in his chair, with a long sigh of relief. He had won the battle.

"Miss Croydon," he said, "I'm going to reward you for your frankness by telling you something which I had intended to keep secret awhile longer. Just to punish you. Your sister never was the wife of Tremaine and has nothing whatever to fear from him. He has no hold on her at all. She has never been anybody's wife but Mr. Delroy's."

She was staring at him with widely opened eyes, her hands clasped above her head.

"Oh, if it were really so!" she cried.

"It is so," repeated Godfrey, and took a little yellow envelope from his pocket. "Read this." And he unfolded a sheet of paper and held it toward her.

She took it with trembling hand and read the message written upon it, but seemingly without understanding it.

"It is a clue," he explained, "from the Record's correspondent at Dieppe."

Your pardon, Lester," he added, with a fleeting smile. "I forgot to show it to you on the trip out. Please read it aloud, Miss Croydon."

"The widow of Victor Charente," she read in a low voice, "died here Feb. 21, 1901. Had never married again." She looked up, her brows still knitted.

"Well?" she asked.

"Well," said Godfrey, "Victor Charente is the real name of Tremaine. He married that girl many years before he met your sister. She was his legal wife. Your sister never was. She was never the legal wife of any one except Richard Delroy."

She understood now, and the glad tears burst forth unrestrained. Indeed, she made no effort to restrain them, but only rocked back and forth, pressing the message against her heart.

"Your sister never was the wife of Tremaine,"

After a pause, when words were to Paris at once and finally succeeded in buying the man off. Father paid him 50,000 francs, I believe. Perhaps it was the fact that he knew he was not really Edith's husband, that he himself had committed a crime, which made him take it. He agreed to leave the country, and in the following December he wrote father that he was about to sail for Martinique in a ship called the Contour. He said he intended to buy a plantation at Martinique and make that his home. In February we learned that the Contour had been lost, with all on board. After eight years it seemed certain that he was dead, and Edith felt free to marry again."

"Was Mr. Delroy informed of this early indiscretion?"

"Certainly, and forgave it, as any good man would."

"Pardon me for asking the question, Miss Croydon; but it was necessary. When was it you first learned that Tremaine was still alive?"

"One night nearly two months ago Edith brought his letter to me. She was wild, distracted, ready to kill herself—that is what I have feared every

"Thank God!" she said. "Thank God!" And then she started up from her chair. "I must tell her," she said, "at once. If you know how she has suffered, she must not be left in that cruel position an instant longer."

"Very well," agreed Godfrey. "We will wait for you here."

She disappeared through a door at the further end of the room, but in a moment came softly back again.

"She is asleep," she said. "I will wait until she wakes. What a joyful awakening it will be!" And she sat down again. She wiped away the tears, but her eyes were still shining. Godfrey gazed at her with a face full of emotion.

"Now, Miss Croydon," he began, "you've told me that my theory's correct, but there are three or four points I should like you to help me clear up, if you will."

"I shall be glad to if I can," she answered, and smiled at him, her eyes brimming again. "You've lifted such a load from me, Mr. Godfrey, that I do almost anything to show my gratitude."

"Why, looking at her, did his face change—soften, harden? Why did his hands tremble so? It was over in an instant; yet I had caught a glimpse of his secret. I understood."

"It was nothing," he said. "I was glad to do it. I was deeply pleased when that message came this morning."

"You've been kinder to me than I deserved," she said; and I more than half agreed with her. How, with his eyes before her, could she fail to understand? Perhaps she did understand. I was never sure.

"In the first place, then, Miss Croydon," he went on, in a different tone, "how did your father succeed in getting your sister away from Tremaine?"

"They had gone to Paris," she answered, "and in two or three days Edith had awakened from her dream. She saw something in the man which terrified her, and she wrote a pitiful

"I saw a very devil spring into Tremaine's face. He looked about him for some weapon and picked up a piece of pipe that lay beside the radiator. Thompson saw the action and lurched heavily toward him."

"Goin' to use that on me, Vio?" he asked. "You'd better try it!" And he made a pass at Tremaine and tried to smash the pipe away. "You try it on, an' I'll blow your game like I did once before down at Sydney."

He struck at Tremaine again, but the latter sprang away and in an instant had brought the pipe down upon his head. Thompson fell like a log; then that fiendish look flashed into Tremaine's face for a second time, he snatched out a revolver; I dimly understood what was coming—indeed, I had my own revolver in my hand, and I fired at him, but my shot went wild, while his—

She stopped and buried her face in her hands, overcome for the moment by the terrible spectacle her words had evoked.

She controlled herself by an effort, took down her hands—

"He put his pistol away and stepped over very close to me."

"Miss Croydon," he said rapidly, "it will be well for you to say you did not know me. I have committed no crime; he was the aggressor; what I did was done in self defense. One thing more—your sister has nothing to fear from me; I shall never bother her again; I promise you that."



Your sister never was the wife of Tremaine.

(To Be Continued)

day. The lady Mr. Godfrey, the Godfrey, and yet she had loved the wife of another man. He demanded that she must him in a marriage house. I know she would have such a meeting and yet he must be seen. I offered to go in her stead. I had some wild idea of appeasing his better nature, of persuading him."

She stopped, shivering in her own emotion.

"That, of course, would not have altered the fact that your sister was his wife," observed Godfrey.

"No. That was the terrible part of it. Nothing could alter that. These months, of course, he a separation, but we thought we would solve that problem after we had settled the other. So I went. He opened the door for me. I had never seen him, and I scarce his appearance, and I was not at all what I expected. He did not look in the least like a scoundrel, or did he not like me. He seemed to me with attention and seeming respect. He even appeared moved. One I know now what a hypocrite he was. I know that he was laughing at me—that he was planning something deeper, more villainous than I had thought of. I was all that he could gather together at that moment—and I pressed it upon him, urging him to take it and go away and we would send him home. (He pretended to refuse the money, to protest that that was not in the least what he wanted, but I compelled him to take it. And just as I was hoping that I had prevailed with him the door of the bedroom opened and a horrible drunken man staggered out."

"Well, Vio," he cried, "this is the deal, is it? She's a likely piece, I wouldn't give her up, Vio, for ten thousand!"

"Go back to bed, you drunken brute!" cried Tremaine, and took him roughly by the arm.

"That the other shook him off."

"Don't lay your hands on me, Vio!" he cried. "Don't dare lay your hands on me!"

"I saw a very devil spring into Tremaine's face. He looked about him for some weapon and picked up a piece of pipe that lay beside the radiator. Thompson saw the action and lurched heavily toward him."

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(To Be Continued)



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